

In My Head Like a Catchy Song by **Kamije Celeek**

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Summary: Mike didn't believe in love until November 1983, and she wormed her way inside his head and he never wanted to let her go.

In My Head Like a Catchy Song

We're far apart in every way

But you're the best part of my day

And sure as I breathe the air

I know that we are the perfect pair.

Mike had never believed in love.

Well, romantic love, that is. The whole heart-skips-a-beat-and-you-forget-how-to-breathe thing. Yeah, to him, it was bullshit. His parents hadn't loved each other at any point in his memory, and he'd watched their marriage crumble into a pile of rubble. Mike's idea of love was showing that you cared about someone, particularly someone close to you. It was why he spent so much time with his friends and tried to make the most of any situation. It was just his way of showing he cared.

Nancy started dating Steve and Mike still didn't think it was love. Lust, maybe, but not love. He didn't understand how love made you climb onto a roof and sneak into someone else's bedroom. How could anybody be so desperate to see somebody that they couldn't wait until morning? When he'd posed this question to Nancy, she'd scoffed and said, 'you'll get it when you're older.' But he didn't care. Just because you couldn't keep your hands off someone didn't mean you loved them.

When Will went missing, Mike felt a slight pain in his chest. His best friend was just *not there* and he couldn't do anything about it. Well, there was one thing he could do: sneak out and look for him. And he convinced Lucas and Dustin to go with him because they all loved Will as their friend. They'd find him and everything would go back to normal. That was the thought going through Mike's head as he hiked through the pouring rain in the woods near Mirkwood. Once Will was back, everything would be back to normal and they'd go back to the way he liked it.

Any possibility of that went out the window when he saw her.

She had a shaved head, no shoes, and the Benny's Burgers T-shirt she was wearing had blood on it. Not to mention the shirt was the only thing that she was wearing. She was soaked, freezing, and scared out of her mind. He didn't blame her. He pulled off his jacket and put it around her shoulders, ignoring the protests from Dustin and Lucas as he insisted on taking her home and getting her out of the damn rain.

Already, his heart was doing funny little flips in his chest as she held onto him on his bike. He and his friends made their way back to his house, where they argued over what to do. Both Dustin and Lucas were freaked out by this girl who didn't even look like a girl to the two of them. Mike thought it was obvious, since she was really pretty and guys usually weren't that pretty. Something in her warm caramel-brown eyes drew him in and made his heart swell until he thought it was going to burst. Even her voice was soft and gentle, though her vocabulary seemed severely limited. That didn't matter. What mattered was getting her help.

He'd known that she'd come from a bad situation if she was wandering around the woods at night, but her reaction to him touching her arm confirmed it. Internally, he wondered how she could be so defiant when whoever had been taking care of her had limited her very *identity* to a mere number. Externally, he rectified it by giving her a name. *El, short for Eleven*. Like Mike, short for Michael. Her slight smile at the name made his breath hitch the tiniest bit as he told her good night.

He was a goner the moment she returned the words.

On a prickly path that goes on for miles.

But it's worth it just to see you smile.

Over that week, Mike wasn't in the best place emotionally. Between Will being missing and finding this girl that made his chest feel weird, he was never sure what to be feeling at a given moment. He could remember the first time he yelled at her—for lying about Will being alive—and the tears that had appeared in her eyes shortly

afterwards. She'd been in the fort the next morning and he'd berated her more before she used her powers to show that she hadn't been lying at all.

Maybe it was the makeover that did it. She walked out of Nancy's room with the blonde wig and that dress and his heart had skipped a beat as she waited for their assessment.

Pretty... pretty good.

That was nowhere *near* what he really wanted to say. He wanted to tell her that she was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen in his life. But Dustin and Lucas had been *right there* and had been teasing him about Eleven since they found her in the woods and he wasn't sure she understood the nuances of a compliment like that. But hearing her repeat his words in her soft voice made his heart do that funny little flip-flop thing again.

She stopped Troy from attacking him and made his bully pee his pants. Thanks to her powers, they were able to hear Will better in the Upside-Down. And having her nearby made him feel complete in a way he hadn't for as long as he could remember. The two of them, walking side by side with Dustin and Lucas just ahead... it felt *right*. Even though she seemed jumpy and nervous, he only paid attention to the compass in his hand. He didn't think much of her looking around and begging him to turn back.

Something inside him snapped when he heard Lucas accuse El of being a traitor, and Mike of being blind because of her. That was why he'd attacked one of his closest friends. Emotions had run high and he'd heard El begging him to stop but his pride wouldn't let him. She threw Lucas off him and he was shocked that she'd done it. Naturally, he'd rushed over to help his friend and started screaming at her, not noticing the look of horror on her face. She hadn't done it on purpose, but he'd screamed those words at her.

What is wrong with you?!

And then she was gone and he found himself feeling angry—not at her, no, he could *never* be angry at her—but at himself. He'd yelled at her and now she was gone and he didn't know if she was ever coming

back. Not to mention Lucas was being an ass and refusing to accept that her throwing him had been an accident. He and Dustin searched for her but then Troy showed up and he found himself staring death in the face at the top of that cliff.

And he'd jumped.

And she'd caught him.

Hearing her cry was the most heartbreaking thing that he'd ever heard in his life and he wanted to make her feel better. Holding her—now that had felt right. He never wanted to let go of her. Even if Dustin started to third-wheel a bit. And taking her home? It only seemed natural to him.

Just like him trying to kiss her.

She flipped the van right over his head. She clung to him like a lifeline in the abandoned bus. And she looked to him for comfort in every situation. He wanted nothing more than for this to all be over, for them to find Will and for her to have a normal life.

Somewhere along the line, he'd started picturing it. He wanted her to have the life she deserved and he wanted to be a part of it. He never wanted to be apart from her and that thought scared him. He'd never believed in love, but this girl he'd known for less than a week was making him believe. And he'd kissed her and his fate was sealed. She was it for him, and they were going to be happy together whether it was as boyfriend and girlfriend or just really close friends. He didn't care which. He just *needed her*.

Then somehow it all went to shit and she was gone again.

But this time he couldn't find her.

And I cannot be pulled apart

From the hold you have on my heart.

And even if the world tells us it's wrong,

You're in my head like a catchy song.

Everything else in Hawkins had gone back to normal. But Mike couldn't. He couldn't go pretending everything was normal and fine and dandy when El wasn't there. Dustin and Lucas had moved on, Will didn't understand, and Nancy was still mourning Barb. Mike was alone. Nobody understood him the way El had. She never made fun of him or teased him for being a nerd. Every part of who she was—her face, her voice, her curiosity of the world around her that was so *new*—was etched into his mind. He desperately wanted to see or hear her, anything to tell him she was alive and safe and *not dead in the Upside-Down*.

That's why he'd started calling her. Surely, she missed him, too? And if she could talk to Will in the Upside-Down, then surely she could hear him talking to her through his Super-Comm. Every day, he'd be down in the basement, talking to her and praying to hear her voice. And every day he went without an answer. Sometimes, he could *feel* her nearby, as if she could hear him but wasn't responding for some ungodly reason. But knowing she was there made his heart a little lighter until he remembered that he couldn't see her or hear her and that made it so much worse somehow.

For almost a *year*, he called her every day and his emotions began to crumble. He was angry—angry at his parents for not understanding, angry at his friends for moving on, angry at himself for letting her sacrifice herself, angry at the Demogorgon for taking her away, angry at the lab that Will was forced to visit and that had tortured the love of his life, and most of all, angry at a world that wouldn't let El live in *peace*. She deserved it. Who *cared* that she had mind powers? She didn't like using them much. And those nosebleeds made him worried more than anything else.

Will crumbled, too, being possessed by the Mind Flayer and forced to act as a spy. And Mike forgot El for a few days as he tried to help his best friend through what was going on. She was in the back of his mind but Will was his priority. Even when they were in the lab and Bob was torn apart by the Demodogs, his mind flashed back to watching El vanish in a flurry of Demogorgon scraps and he felt ready to cry and wanted to scream at the sky for letting such awful things happen to Bob and to Will and to El—the three best people

he'd ever met. He'd heard the locks clicking on the door and watched it open as she walked through.

And he forgot how to breathe.

She was *there*, she was there and alive and looking so badass with her punk makeup and leather jacket and gelled-up hair (she had *hair* now!) and Mike could only say her name as he swept her into a hug. She smelled like smoke and hair gel and public transportation but he didn't give a fuck. All that mattered was that she was home, she was safe, she was with him again. 357 days of waiting and she was back. Then Hopper pulled her into a hug and Mike felt the anger rising again in the way they interacted.

Hopper. Hopper had kept her away. He'd told her not to answer. He'd been the one hiding her for almost a year and *lying to Mike's face* about not knowing anything. And even more than that, it suddenly struck Mike who had told the bad men where El was and he took out his anger on the Chief before breaking down in tears. When he saw El again, she was talking to Joyce about the Gate and there was a plan made and Mike was being left behind again. He couldn't help her do anything.

That's why he'd insisted on burning the Hub and making sure El could make it to the Gate safely. It was the least he could do after she'd saved his life so many times. Watching it burn gave him satisfaction he hadn't had for a long time and he was running away from the Demodogs and then the vine wrapped around his ankle. Being freed, his only thought was getting to the surface and getting back to the Byers house so he could be there for El when she made it back safely. She had to make it back.

And she did.

And a month later, he kept his promise from the year before—he went with her to the Snow Ball. She was still the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen in his life and even though she told him that she still had to hide for a little bit, he didn't care because she also told him that Hopper would let him visit her out at the cabin. The thought of being able to see her and her having a semi-normal life now was enough for him and for her.

Seasons change and leaves may fall

But I'll be with you through them all.

And rain or shine, you'll always be mine.

Through the winter and spring, he visited her whenever he could and whenever Hopper let him. Sometimes she'd call him on her Super-Comm in the middle of the night, seeking comfort from a nightmare, or he'd call her when his parents were fighting and he needed to hear her voice. It worked and he was finally starting to feel happy again. He had his friends, he had El, and his life was finally starting to go the way he wanted it. Whether it be playing D&D with the guys or walking through the woods with El behind the cabin, he didn't want to change anything about it. Not after everything that had happened. They deserved a break.

He found out things about El he hadn't known before, too. She loved rain but hated thunder and lightning. She loved soap operas on TV and had been learning Morse code from Hopper. And she'd heard him for 353 days when he called her.

She told him about her mother and her aunt Becky and Kali and Kali's gang and the man she'd almost killed in Chicago. And he'd held her while she cried about wanting to be like everyone else, not wanting to be in the cabin anymore but was more content with it because he was allowed to visit now. She told him about the lab, about how she was claustrophobic, and he listened to everything she said because she was El and she needed him to listen. And she listened to him when he told her about problems at home and at school and his worries about starting high school.

But she'd be there, too.

On a prickly path that goes on for miles.

You're the only one who makes it all worthwhile.

He and El supported each other throughout high school. She was

bullied for being with him but neither cared. He *did* care when other guys didn't get the memo and started hitting on her frequently because she was pretty and they didn't understand why she was with him over any of them. And sometimes he wondered why she stuck by him because she was too beautiful and perfect to ever stay with the king of the nerds, Mike Wheeler. But then she'd kiss him and assure him that she had no intentions of being with anybody else, ever, and that made it better.

Mike had never believed in love. He'd never understood how love could make somebody sneak into their significant other's bedroom to be near them because they couldn't wait until morning. It was a bizarre stupid act of lust to him and it didn't make any sense. Nancy had said he'd understand when he was older and she was right. Because with El, he hated being away from her for any period of time. He snuck into her bedroom—especially once Joyce and Hopper got married and moved in a couple blocks away—and cuddled with her during the night. She did the same and he finally understood.

Mike Wheeler finally believed in love. He'd believed in it since that rainy night, November 1983, when he met the girl who would be his near-constant companion for the rest of his life. It was all he needed and all he wanted. Mike and Eleven, that was what they both needed and they both had. No matter how many times the world seemed conspired against them, they always found their way back to each other in the end. Staying hidden, long-distance, fights—none of it could break them apart. They stayed together and that was beautiful.

And you should not blame me too

If I can't help falling in love with you...

And it was because of his love for her that they were married before they were twenty, parents before they were twenty-one, and so happy together. She had him wrapped around her finger as much as their daughter did, and that was fine with him. She was in his head like a catchy song on the radio and he never wanted her to leave that space.

Now he was content.

Lying on the couch with El's head on his shoulder and their baby daughter asleep on his chest, he couldn't imagine another life for any of them. It was perfect. She was perfect.

He believed in love when it was with her.

Okay, I heard this song and I can't believe nobody's made a Mileven AMV or something for it. Somebody get on it, please.

Song is 'You're In My Head Like a Catchy Song', as performed by Felicia Day. Look it up; it's a beautiful love story about Romeo and Juliet without the death and destruction.

So long and thanks for all the fish!